

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of purchasing merchandise for a recipient, comprising:

a step of accepting an order either for a simple purchase and delivery of merchandise, for the purchase of merchandise as a gift not accompanied by an option to select, or for a purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select;

a step of making an unconditional delivery upon acceptance of an order either for the simple purchase and delivery of merchandise or for the purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift not accompanied by an option to select, in which the necessary arrangements are made for the unconditional delivery of the merchandise, as designated by the orderer, without granting the recipient an option to select;

a step of granting the recipient an option to select upon acceptance of an order for the purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select, in which the designated recipient is informed of a content of the gift and is granted an option of selecting from a set of choices, including "take" and "credit"; and

a step of responding to a selection by the recipient, whereby if the recipient selects the "take," the necessary arrangements are made to deliver to the recipient the merchandise designated by the orderer as a gift; or if the recipient selects the "credit," a credit is posted to the account of the recipient, in accordance with the price of the merchandise designated by the orderer as a gift; and

wherein the credit posted to the account of the recipient may be applied to all or part of the amount of an order, either for the simple purchase and delivery of merchandise or for the purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift not accompanied by an option to select.

2. The method according to claim 1, wherein the credit posted to the account of the recipient may also be applied to all or part of the amount of an order for the purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select.

3. A method of purchasing merchandise for a recipient, comprising:

a step of accepting an order for a purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select;

a step of granting a recipient an option to select upon acceptance of an order for the purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select, in which the designated recipient is informed of a content of the gift and is granted an option of selecting from

a set of choices, including “take” and “credit”; and

a step of responding to a selection by the recipient, whereby if the recipient selects the “take,” the necessary arrangements are made to deliver to the recipient the merchandise designated by the orderer as a gift; or if the recipient selects the “credit,” a credit is posted to the account of the recipient in accordance with the price of the merchandise designated by the orderer as a gift; and

wherein the credit posted to the account of the recipient may be applied to all or part of the amount of an order for the purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select.

4. A method of purchasing merchandise for a recipient, comprising:

a step of accepting an order for a purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select;

a step of granting a recipient an option to select upon acceptance of an order for the purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select, in which the designated recipient is informed of a content of the gift and is granted an option of selecting from a set of choices, including “take” and “exchange”; and

a step of responding to a selection by the recipient, whereby if the recipient selects the “take,” the necessary arrangements are made to deliver to the recipient the merchandise designated by the orderer as a gift; or if the recipient selects the “exchange,” the merchandise designated as a gift by the orderer is replaced by the merchandise designated by the recipient and the necessary arrangements are made for the delivery thereof to the recipient.

5. The method according to any of claims 1 through 3, wherein a nomination fee, according to a price of a scheduled sale, is paid to a potential dealer of the merchandise originally scheduled for purchase as a gift but not actually purchased because the recipient selects “credit.”

6. The method according to any of claims 1 through 3, which is implemented by a broker who operates between the customer and one or a plurality of merchandise dealers.

7. The method according to claim 5, wherein the reduction in the actual credit amount due to the payment of the nomination fee to the potential dealer is adjusted by charging a credit-service fee such that the actual credit amount matches the apparent credit amount.

8. The method according to claims 1 through 3, wherein:

upon acceptance of an order for a gift accompanied by an option to select, the broker is paid cash and/or credit at the purchase price of the gift;

a certain amount in accordance with the cash paid by the orderer is allocated to the fee for the broker, whether or not the recipient selects "credit";

upon selection of "credit" by the recipient, a certain amount in accordance with the purchase price of the gift is allocated to the fee for the dealer who has lost the opportunity to sell the gift; and the purchase price of the gift is posted as a credit to the account of the recipient;

when the recipient uses the credit thereof to order a new gift accompanied by an option to select, the recipient is charged a fee, either in credit or cash, in accordance with the amount of credit used;

thereby adjusting the difference between the amount of credit owned by the recipient and the amount of cash deposited with the broker by reducing the amount of credit or collecting cash.

9. A business operation/management apparatus, comprising:

a means of accepting an order through Internet for a simple purchase and delivery of merchandise, for a purchase of merchandise as a gift not accompanied by an option to select, or for a purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select;

a means of making an unconditional delivery upon acceptance of an order, either for the simple purchase and delivery of merchandise or for the purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift not accompanied by an option to select, in which the necessary data is processed to deliver to a recipient the merchandise, as designated by the orderer, without granting the recipient an option to select;

a means of informing the recipient of a content of the gift, upon acceptance of an order for the purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select, in which the recipient is informed, through Internet, of the contents of the gift as originally ordered;

a means of querying the selection, whereby the intent of the recipient relative to the offer of the gift is queried through the Internet, in the form of giving to the recipient a choice between the "take" and "credit" relative to the gift as originally offered; and

a means of responding to and processing a selection, where upon selection of "take" by the recipient, the necessary data is processed to deliver the merchandise designated as a gift by the orderer; or upon selection of "credit" by the recipient, the necessary data is processed to post

a credit to the account of the recipient according to the price of the merchandise designated as a gift by the orderer; and

wherein a credit posted to the account of the recipient may be applied to all or part of the amount of an order, either for the simple purchase and delivery of merchandise or for the purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift not accompanied by an option to select.

10. The apparatus according to claim 9, wherein the credit posted to the account of the recipient may also be applied to all or part of the amount of an order for the purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select.

11. A business operation/management apparatus, comprising:

a means of accepting orders through Internet for purchase and delivery of certain merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select;

a means of informing a recipient of contents of the gift, where upon receipt of an order for the purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select, the recipient is informed, through the Internet, of the contents of the gift as originally ordered;

a means of querying the selection, whereby the intent of the recipient relative to the gift as originally offered is queried, through the Internet, in the form of giving the recipient a choice between "take" and "credit"; and

a means of responding to and processing a selection, where upon selection of "take" by the recipient the necessary data is processed to deliver the merchandise designated as a gift by the orderer; or upon selection of "credit" by the recipient the necessary data is processed to post a credit to the account of the orderer in accordance with the price of the gift designated by the orderer; and

wherein the credit posted to the account of the recipient may be applied to all or part of the amount of an order for the purchase and delivery of merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select.

12. A business operation/management apparatus, comprising:

a means of accepting orders whereby an order is accepted through Internet for purchase and delivery of certain merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select;

a means of informing a recipient of contents of the gift, where upon receipt of an order for the purchase and delivery of certain merchandise as a gift accompanied by an option to select the recipient of the gift is informed, through the Internet, of the contents of the gift as originally

ordered;

a means of querying the selection, whereby intent of the recipient relative to the gift as originally offered is queried, through the Internet, in the form of giving the recipient a choice between “take” and “exchange”; and

a means of responding to and processing a selection, where upon selection of “take” by the recipient the necessary data is processed to deliver the merchandise designated as a gift by the orderer; or upon selection of “exchange” by the recipient the necessary data is processed to post a credit to the account of the orderer in accordance with the price of the gift designated by the orderer.

13. The business operation/management apparatus described in any of claims 9 through 12, wherein a means of accepting an order accepts an order via a website on the Internet.

14. The business operation/management apparatus described in claim 13, wherein a website for accepting an order for a gift includes at least one virtual outlet store.

15. The business operation/management apparatus described in claim 13, wherein a website for accepting an order for a gift is linked to at least one website on the Internet for a sale of merchandise.

16. The business operation/management apparatus described in any of claims 9 through 12, wherein a means of informing the contents of a gift is intended to inform the recipient of the gift though the sending of e-mail containing information on links to the website of a virtual outlet store selling gift merchandise.